

New River Gorge

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National River
West Virginia



Sunset on the New River near Thurmond

Photo above—NPS/Jim Carrico; illustrations below—NPS/Patricia Topper

Welcome to the New River

The river and the gorge—with their impressive display of natural forces—immediately command your attention. For centuries the gorge remained virtually inaccessible along its entire length. Then, in 1873, the railroad opened this isolated part of West Virginia, and the landscape began to change. The railroad bordered the river, making possible the shipment of coal to the outside world. Coal mining grew. Towns near the coalfields flourished. In time, company men (bosses and representatives of the coal industry)

clashed with miners who demanded better working conditions. Accounts of this bitter labor movement are recorded in the songs and legends that have become part of our cultural history. The stories remain but most of the coal towns are gone, abandoned when the mines played out.

In southern stretches, where the river is quiet with a broad floodplain, farming developed as the way of life and provided its own contribution to Southern Appalachian culture.

The New River is renowned for its excellent fishing, and it is a premier whitewater boating river. Some of West Virginia's rarest plants grow here. Congress established the park in 1978 to preserve and protect this important free-flowing waterway. Today 53 miles of the river and its gorge and 40 miles of tributaries are preserved as New River Gorge National River, Gauley River National Recreation Area, and Bluestone National Scenic River. Please help us care for the park—for your enjoyment and for future generations.



What's in a Name?

The name, New River, is not an accurate description because this river may be one of the oldest in North America. The most-accepted estimate suggests that the river has been in its present course for at least 65 million years. The New was once a longer river (called the Teays by geologists) that flowed through central Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois and emptied into the Mississippi. About 10,000 years ago the last advance of glacial ice buried most of this river and diverted water of the New into the Ohio and Kanawha rivers that were created by glacial action.

Another indication of the New River's old age is that it flows across the Appalachian Plateau, not around or from it as other streams. The river was there before the Appalachians formed—and the mountains are very old.

New River's deep gorge exposes geologic history as it slices through the rock layers that tilted as the Appalachian Mountains rose. Some rocks exposed here are as old as 330 million years.

(See diagram at right.) Because of the nature of the tilt, younger rock layers are in the northern area of the park. As you explore the park look for black streaks, containing coal deposits.



Activities in the New River Gorge

To many visitors this park is whitewater! Here the New River falls 750 feet in 50 miles, from Bluestone Dam to Gauley Bridge, creating one of the finest whitewater rivers in the eastern United States. By comparison the Mississippi River falls 1,428 feet from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of 2,300 miles.

The park's southern end has Class I to III rapids ideal for intermediate boaters. North of Thurmond, Class I to V rapids require greater skill. Only experienced and properly equipped boaters should try to navigate these waters. For safety, others should go with an outfitter who knows the river.

Anglers fish from banks, shallows, or boats. Climbers tackle the gorge's sandstone cliffs. Others explore scenic and historic areas by foot and mountain bike or from vehicles. You can picnic at the river level and near the rim. If you enjoy vigorous activities or just relaxing—New River Gorge is for you.



Hiking along Kaymoor Trail



Whitewater rafting at Fayette Station



Fishing at Sandstone Falls

Visiting New River Gorge

About the Park This park encompasses 70,000 acres along the New River between the towns of Hinton and Fayetteville. The park and surrounding area are rich in history and in scenic and recreational opportunities.

Visitor Centers The Canyon Rim and Sandstone visitor centers offer information, exhibits, program schedules, and bookstores with publications about the gorge.

Canyon Rim Canyon Rim Visitor Center is open year-round except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. A boardwalk has views of the gorge and the New River Gorge Bridge, the world's longest single-arch steel-span bridge.

Thurmond Historic District In the early 1900s this boomtown had the highest revenue on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway. The restored depot serves as a park visitor center. (Open seasonally.)

Grandview Grandview is known for its scenic overlooks, spring rhododendron displays, outdoor theater, and trails with superb views.

Sandstone Visitor Center The visitor center is open year-round except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The site has a picnic area and views of the gorge and the New River.

Sandstone Falls A fully accessible boardwalk leads to river-level views of the largest falls on the New River, which span 1,500 feet.

Trails Trails feature old coal towns, waterfalls, geological formations, and views of the gorge. Check with park staff for information on trails that allow mountain biking and horseback riding. Some property within the park is privately owned. Please respect the rights of owners. Beware of decaying structures and industrial remains.

River Recreation Commercial outfitters conduct trips down the river from April through October. For a list of licensed outfitters, ask at a visitor center or call 1-800-CALL WVA. Some of the finest fishing in the state is on the New River; a West Virginia fishing license is required.

Other Area Parks Within or near the park are seven West Virginia state parks: Carnifex Ferry Battlefield, Hawks Nest, Babcock, Little Beaver, Bluestone, Camp Creek, and Pipestem Resort. For information about these parks call the West Virginia Division of Tourism, 1-800-CALL WVA.

Gauley River National Recreation Area is north of Canyon Rim Visitor Center. The Gauley is known for its rugged beauty, whitewater, and superb fishing. Bluestone National Scenic River, south of Hinton, protects a pristine area of the Bluestone River.

Trains CSX Transportation owns and operates 70 miles of rail lines within the park. An AMTRAK passenger train, the Cardinal, travels the gorge regularly. For information call 1-800-USA RAIL. Trespassing on CSX tracks or access roads is dangerous and is strictly prohibited.

For Area Information Southern West Virginia Convention and Visitors Bureau P.O. Box 1799 Beckley WV 25802-1799 1-800-VISIT WVA www.visitwv.com

Bridge Day is the third Saturday in October. Call 1-800-927-0263.

For Park Information New River Gorge National River P.O. Box 246 Glen Jean, WV 25846 304-465-0508 www.nps.gov/neri

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